

DEPARTMENT OF CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY PATROL

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NEW LAWS AFFECT CALIFORNIA MOTORISTS

SACRAMENTO –Several new laws will go into effect Jan. 1, 2000 that will make changes in the California Vehicle Code, according to California Highway Patrol Commissioner Dwight (Spike) Helmick.

“Of particular interest to motorists are laws which will modify the school bus red light law, allow motorists to pull off the road in non-injury collisions and make permanent the proof-of-insurance requirements,” Helmick said.

Here’s a brief look at what has changed:

School bus red light law (AB 1573-Strom-Martin) expands the exemptions to the requirement that school bus drivers activate the vehicle’s red light every time a pupil enters or exits the bus. The exemptions include: (1) a legally parked school bus (2) a disabled bus (3) pupils requiring assistance are boarding (4) an icy or snowy roadway (5) bus is completely off the main roadway.

In addition, the legislation clarifies that motor vehicle drivers need not stop for the school bus red lights if the motorists are driving on the opposite side of a divided or multiple-lane highway.

Property damage collisions (SB 681-Speier) clarifies existing law that allows motorists who are involved in property-damage-only collisions to pull off the road and out of the traffic lanes without waiting for law enforcement to arrive. The measure is expected to combat traffic congestion.

Proof of insurance (SB 652-Speier) makes permanent the requirement that vehicle owners have proof of insurance before they can register their vehicles. The provisions were set to expire Jan. 1, 2000. The measure also requires that proof be provided on an insurance company form. Formerly, motorists could carry handwritten documents.

Other new laws include:

Commercial vehicles (AB 1650-Omnibus Transportation Bill) beefs up penalties for truck drivers who evade a law enforcement officer. A first offense would be a year’s license revocation and a second would mean permanent revocation. Also, truckers driving more than 15 mph over the speed limit will be guilty of a misdemeanor considered a “serious violation” subject to a 60 to 120-day driving prohibition.

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Farm labor vehicles (AB555-Reyes/AB 1165-Flores) must be equipped with safety belts for every passenger. Headlights are required to be turned on at all times on the road. Vehicles will be inspected yearly and certified as road worthy. The public may report mechanical and moving violations to a hotline, 1-800-TELL-CHP.

Motorized scooters (SB 441-Chesbro) adds a category of vehicle to California Vehicle Code of “motorized scooter”. The statute requires that the driver must be 16, although the driver doesn’t need to be licensed. A motorized scooter must follow all laws that apply to bicycles.

Low speed vehicles (SB 186-Costa) defines a low-speed vehicle as one weighing under 1,800 pounds and incapable of speeds over 25 mph. Low speed vehicles must be registered and are restricted to roadways with speed limits of 35 mph or less.

Low emission vehicles (AB 71-Cuneen) allows motorists driving electric and natural gas vehicles to drive in the High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes without regard to number of passengers. An identifying sticker designating such vehicles will be available at the DMV.

Hand signals (SB 532 Omnibus Bill) outlaws the use of hand signals to indicate a stop or a turn unless the vehicle is not equipped with signals or the signals don’t work.

Double fine zones (SB155-Knight) adds three double-fine zones to existing zones created to reduce crashes on especially dangerous highways. The zones include State Route 138 between Avenue T and Pearblossom Highway and the intersection with I-15; US 101 between Boronda Road and the San Benito-Monterey County line; and State Route 152 between the State Route 156 junction and the Ferguson Road intersection.

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